

IN THE CLAIMS:

1-22. (canceled)

23. (previously presented) The merchandise return system of claim 24 further comprising:

one of electronic or non-electronic forms of records attached to returnable units of merchandise during or before order fulfillment wherein the forms facilitate research of information with the association service.

24. (currently amended) An out-sourced merchandise-return system providing a network of distributed ~~point-of-return associates~~ retail mail, parcel and shipping stores with the walk-in return business of remote and generally online ~~merchandisers~~ mail-order merchants; the system comprising:

a distributed purchasing public of remote ~~merchandisers~~ mail-order merchants' merchandise making purchases of such by credit card;

a plurality of remote ~~merchandisers~~ mail-order merchants transacting mail-order sales paid for by credit card accompanied in each instance by a form of record thereof, whereby the ~~merchandisers~~ mail-order merchants likely desire greater physical distribution among their distributed purchasers of brick-and-mortar centers for sake of offering proximity for walk-in return service;

a network of distributed ~~point-of-return associates who generally provide retail mail, parcel and shipping services~~ retail mail, parcel and shipping stores providing a network of distributed, physical stores in which to process the walk-in return business of the remote ~~merchandisers~~ mail-order merchants, and which ~~point-of-return associates~~ retail mail, parcel and shipping stores do not stock or offer the remote ~~merchandisers~~ mail-order merchants's merchandise or merchandise competitive thereto for retail sale but whose motivation for offering to process returns thereof is ~~originally for the sake of earning~~ for the reverse logistics business thereof;

an association resource providing merchandise-return information services for exchange among the ~~point-of-return associates~~ retail mail, parcel and shipping stores over a communications medium; and

an out-sourced merchandise-return program configured such that the ~~point-of-return associates~~ retail mail, parcel and shipping stores accept the walk-in returns of the ~~merchandisers~~ mail-order merchants' merchandise upon authorization received from the merchandise-return information services based on the input of information from the form of record for the merchandise;

~~whereby said out-sourced merchandise-return system affords the point-of-return associates expanded opportunities to increase public traffic by offering to process returns for the remote merchandisers;~~

wherein the association resource is a resource for merchandise-return information corresponding to information on original sales transactions by which a given ~~merchandiser~~ mail-order merchant fulfilled or caused fulfillment of orders of merchandise; and

~~wherein the plurality of remote merchandisers deal in a wide variety of differing goods and the distributed community of point-of-return associates who predominantly generally provide retail mail, parcel and shipping services are substantially not competitive with the goods of the merchandisers by virtue of not stocking the goods of the remote merchandisers nor goods competitive therewith~~

wherein any retail mail, parcel and shipping store belonging to the network and chosen by a given purchaser of the given mail-order merchant's merchandise to transact a walk-in return thereof is empowered under the program to give instant credit to the credit card used to make the purchase so that the given purchaser walks out with the instant credit thereto.

25. (currently amended) The merchandise return system of claim 24 wherein the association resource and at least some of the distributed community of ~~point-of-return associates~~ retail mail, parcel and shipping stores are part of a common organization.

26. (previously presented) The merchandise return system of claim 24 wherein the association resource exchanges information over the communications medium with at least some of the plurality of remote merchants.

27. (canceled)

28. (previously presented) The merchandise return system of claim 31 wherein the pertinent return-acceptance criteria are communicated in a message further comprising return fulfillment instructions in cases if the pertinent return-acceptance criteria are met.

29. (currently amended) The merchandise return system of claim 31 wherein:  
the association resource is a resource for such information including that corresponding to information on original sales transactions by which ~~a given~~ any participating merchandiser fulfilled or caused fulfillment of orders of merchandise.

30. (previously presented) The merchandise return system of claim 29 further comprising:

one of electronic or non-electronic forms of records attached to returnable units of merchandise during or before order fulfillment wherein the forms facilitate research of information with the association resource.

31. (currently amended) An out-sourced merchandise-return system providing a network of distributed ~~point-of-return associates~~ retail mail, parcel and shipping stores with the walk-in return business of remote and generally online ~~merchandisers~~ mail-order merchants; the system comprising:

a distributed purchasing public of remote ~~merchandisers~~ mail-order merchants' merchandise making purchases of such by credit card;

a plurality of participating, remote merchandisers that mail-order merchants transacting mail-order sales paid for by credit card and which likely desire greater physical distribution among their distributed purchasers of brick-and-mortar centers for sake of offering proximity for walk-in return service;

a network of distributed point-of-return associates who generally provide retail mail, parcel and shipping services providing a network of distributed, physical stores in which retail mail, parcel and shipping stores which are networked to handle the walk-in return business of the remote merchandisers participating mail-order merchants, and which point-of-return associates retail mail, parcel and shipping stores do not stock or offer the remote merchandisers participating mail-order merchants' merchandise or merchandise competitive thereto for retail sale but whose motivation for offering to process returns thereof is originally for the sake of earning for the reverse logistics business thereof;

an association resource providing merchandise-return information services for exchange among the point-return associates networked retail mail, parcel and shipping stores over a communications medium and being a resource of information pertaining to the merchandise of the remote merchandisers participating mail-order merchants including pertinent return-acceptance criteria; and

an out-sourced merchandise-return program arranged such that the point-of-return associates retail mail, parcel and shipping stores accept the walk-in returns of the merchandisers participating mail-order merchants' merchandise if after contact with the merchandise-return information services the pertinent return-acceptance criteria are met;

~~whereby said out-sourced merchandise-return system affords the point-of-return associates expanded opportunities to increase public traffic by offering to handle returns for the remote merchandisers;~~

~~wherein the plurality of remote merchandisers deal in a wide variety of differing goods and the distributed community of point-of-return associates who predominantly generally provide retail mail, parcel and shipping services are generally not directly competitive with the goods of the merchandisers by virtue of not stocking the goods of the remote merchandisers nor goods competitive therewith~~

wherein any retail mail, parcel and shipping store belonging to the network and chosen by a walk-in party to transact a return of a participating mail-order merchant's merchandise is empowered under the program if the return-acceptance criteria are met to give instant credit to the credit card used to make the purchase so that the walk-in party walks out with instant credit thereto.

32. (currently amended) The merchandise return system of claim 31 wherein said merchandise return system and at least some of the distributed community of ~~point-of-return associates~~ retail mail, parcel and shipping stores are under common ownership or control.

33. (previously presented) The merchandise return system of claim 31 wherein the association resource exchanges information over the communications medium with at least some of the plurality of remote merchants.

34. (canceled)

35. (previously presented) The merchandise return system of claim 37 wherein the merchandise-return information served by the information resource includes criteria for making either a positive or negative return decision and, in cases of positive return decisions, further comprise return fulfillment instructions.

36. (currently amended) ~~The merchandise return system of claim 37~~  
An out-sourced merchandise-return system providing a network of distributed retail mail, parcel and shipping stores with the walk-in return business of remote and generally online mail-order merchants; the system comprising:  
a distributed purchasing public of remote mail-order merchants' merchandise making purchases of such by credit card;

a plurality of participating, remote mail-order merchants making mail-order sales thereto and which likely desire greater physical distribution among their distributed purchasers of brick-and-mortar centers for sake of offering proximity for walk-in return service;

a network of distributed retail mail, parcel and shipping stores which are networked to handle the walk-in return business of the participating mail-order merchants who are motivated to process returns thereof is for earning the reverses logistics business of the participating mail-order merchants as well as an opportunity for showcasing the store as an opportunity for thereafter earning the future mail, parcel and shipping business of any party who walks in to present a return;

a merchandise-return information resource, providing an exchange of information with the point-return associates over a communications medium, for serving responses to requests for merchandise-return information on merchandise presented for return to the retail mail, parcel and shipping stores;

an out-sourced merchandise-return program devised such that the retail mail, parcel and shipping stores accept the walk-in returns of the participating mail-order merchants' merchandise in conformance with the merchandise-return information served by the information resource; and

one of electronic or non-electronic forms of records attached to returnable units of merchandise during or before order fulfillment wherein the forms facilitate research of information with the information resource;

wherein the merchandise-return information served by the information resource includes criteria for making either a positive or negative return decision and, in cases of positive return decisions, further comprise an award instruction applicable to the party presenting the return merchandise or else another party, which award instruction can be chosen from any of instant credit, credit provisional that the merchandiser certifies the propriety of the return upon a later date or event, credit honored by a given association of merchants only, a direct or otherwise refund in cash or equivalent, and/or any combinations thereof; and

wherein any retail mail, parcel and shipping store belonging to the network and chosen by a walk-in party to present a return of a participating mail-order merchant's merchandise is empowered under the program to comply with any award instruction served by the information resource so that the walk-in party walks out with a fixed award.

37. (canceled)

38. (previously presented) The merchandise return system of claim 37 wherein the electronic forms of records comprise codes which when scanned decode into a URL address and the request to be processed by the information resource.

39. (currently amended) The merchandise return system of claim 38 wherein the plurality of ~~remote merchandisers~~ participating mail-order merchants deal in a wide variety of differing goods and the distributed community of ~~point-of-return associates~~ retail mail, parcel and shipping stores generally provide retail mail, parcel and shipping services generally not directly competitive with the goods of the ~~merchandisers~~ participating mail-order merchants.

40. (currently amended) The merchandise return system of claim 37 wherein said merchandise-return information resource and at least some of the distributed community of ~~point-of-return associates~~ retail mail, parcel and shipping stores are under common ownership or control.